

The Three Winds of Albert Lamorisse

BY MARK GOODALL | *University of Bradford*

ABSTRACT

This text discusses the films of French director Albert Lamorisse in relation to the poetics of cinema. It focuses on three of Lamorisse's films, *Crin Blanc* (1953), *Le Ballon Rouge* (1956) and *Le Vent des Amoureux* (1978), in order to examine his fascination with wind, a force of nature, due to its invisibility, that is virtually impossible to capture on film. Certain French theorists, however, have tried to explain the power of the wind, most notably Gaston Bachelard, whose works are quoted here as part of the analysis, while a few distinguished filmmakers, such as Joris Ivens and Andrei Tarkovsky, have used wind in interesting ways. But only Lamorisse had what could be described as a sustained obsession. Despite early success (the great French film theorist André Bazin was praiseworthy about his short films), Lamorisse has been somewhat neglected in recent years. Thus, this essay highlights the unique skills of a 'forgotten man' of French post-war cinema.

"The great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams." (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* 15).

THE SPECTACULAR AMIR KABIR, or Karaj Dam, inaugurated in 1961, can be found approximately forty miles northwest of Tehran. It provides tap water for Tehran's 7.8 million people, in addition to the irrigation demands of over 50,000 hectares of nearby farmland. On June 2, 1970, a helicopter mounted with a motion picture camera was circling the dam, making repeated low runs across the surface of the water in order to get dramatic shots from the air. On the final run, however, the vehicle became entangled in the high-tension wires that support the structure, spiralled out of control, and plummeted into the Karaj River below.

Tragically, everyone on board the helicopter was killed. One of the passengers was the renowned French filmmaker Albert Lamorisse. Lamorisse and his team had been shooting sequences of the spectacular dam for inclusion in a film he was making for the authorities under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran. Increasingly fascinated by the mysticism of Eastern philosophy, Lamorisse had settled in Iran following the success of his feature films and his earlier short films,

several of which are some of the most highly regarded in the history of cinema. The film that Lamorisse was completing, *Le Vent des Amoureux* (The Lovers' Wind), was a documentary study of air currents in Iran and was concerned with the mystic-poetic values of this immense natural force. By the general standards of the non-fiction film, the interaction between sound and the carefully constructed poetic images in *Le Vent des Amoureux* is astonishing. Aside from the tragic and dramatic end to the film's production, Lamorisse, with this venture, had invented a new kind of aerial photography (which he branded 'Helivision') offering some of the most sublime images of the landscape of the globe ever made. In attempting to capture with the film camera something as ethereal and elusive as wind, Lamorisse was creating a new form of cinema. Yet *Le Vent des Amoureux* was not Lamorisse's first encounter with the power of wind. As an analysis of his previous work makes clear, the 'lovers' wind' of Persia was a continuation of a process of discovery, the third of Lamorisse's adventures in movement, time, and space.

THREE WINDS?

Your film will have the beauty, or the sadness, or what have you, that one finds in a town, in a countryside, in a house and not the beauty, sadness etc. that one finds in the *photograph* (my emphasis) of a town, a countryside, or a house. (Bresson 70)

Albert Lamorisse's films certainly strain to achieve an idealisation of the cinematic image on screen. In retrospect, the mystical dimension to Lamorisse's method of filmmaking as seen in *Le Vent des Amoureux* can be located in his early films. But analysing Lamorisse's search for expressing wind through cinema is problematic, not least because there are many possible ways to read this particular kind of work: semiotic, psychoanalytical, mystical. André Bazin discussed Lamorisse's early films in relation to a discussion about montage and realism and the paradoxical nature of how these two seemingly contrary modes co-exist in film (and specifically how *Le Ballon Rouge* does not rely on montage for its charm and beauty).

Ultimately, it is Bazin's poetics of cinema that is useful here. His description of Lamorisse's work as 'documentary on the imagination' is, we shall see, extremely pertinent (46). Pasolini too theorized a 'cinema of poetry'. His notion of 'expressivity,' likening cinema with dreams and memories, which annoyed many film theorists at the time, confirmed the unique qualities of film art and this also attracted Bazin (Pasolini 544).¹ Pasolini was interested in the poetic language of cinema, a form of film art that had been neglected in the drive for cinema as 'language of narrative prose' (547). When wind appears in film it often has the suggestion of a dream. In the films of Lamorisse, 'the tendency of the cinematic language' is expressly subjective and lyrical (548). *Le Vent des Amoureux* is made precisely in the manner of Pasolini's 'free indirect discourse' where a film's connection with

the viewer is akin to that of written (or more accurately 'spoken') poetry (549). I will show how the almost pre-human order of the oneiric, the 'aspiration towards new images' (Bachelard, *Air and Dreams* 2) is what Lamorisse, to the end, sought out.

Another methodology I have found useful is a 'cinophilic' reading of Lamorisse's films. Why? Because the cinophilic 'reading' of film is paradoxically first and foremost 'a way of watching films' (De Baecque and Fremaux qtd. in Keathley 6). Further, as Christian Keathley points out, the fetishisation of details in a film is as ancient as cinema itself (Keathley 8). Lamorisse's films, in my view, invite the perpetual scanning of the screen in a perceptive experience that is 'panoramic' (8). The urban legend that has developed (one of many) around the pioneering films of Auguste and Louis Lumière is that audiences were less entranced with the actions of feeding of the child in *Le Repas de Bébé* (1895) than with the rustling of the wind in the trees, visible in the background of the family group. Lamorisse, consciously or not, also sought out this 'wind in the trees'. In addition to poetic and cinophilic interactions with the cinema of Lamorisse, I have found it also useful to employ thinkers and writers whose works are concerned with the natural elements in art. Thus, the texts of the early surrealist/impressionist writers and the explorations by Gaston Bachelard into the 'poetics of space' and how the 'imaginary is immanent in the real' (Bachelard 1988, *Air and Dreams* viii) are relevant and illuminating.

The key motif in this study is of course that of the wind. The properties of wind have been explored since the early days of cinema, as noted above. The advent of sound film and wide-screen formats allowed for a more nuanced expression of the powers of wind. As an ethereal presence, it is not the most obvious or dramatic element to explore through the cinematic arts. Lyall Watson argues that 'of

¹ What Pasolini said was that 'there is a whole complex world of significant images- formed as much of gestures and of all sorts of signs coming from the environment, as of memories or dreams- which is proposed as the 'instrumental' foundation of cinematic communication.'

In attempting to capture with the film camera something as ethereal as wind, Lamorisse was creating a new form of cinema.

all the natural forces, wind is the most enigmatic' Watson (300). The invisibility of wind is what makes it intriguing cinematically, because even though film is a strongly visual art form, how can it capture something invisible? One way is by using sound and it is this that Lamorisse excels in, especially with *Le Vent des Amoureux*. As Chesterton wrote: 'You cannot see a wind; you can only see that there is a wind' (26-27).

Yet, when wind does appear in film, it can have a devastating effect. One of the more memorable uses of wind occurs in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Mirror* (1975), a mystical and elliptical autobiographical study of the filmmakers' childhood. One of the most famous scenes occurs when the father walks away from the mother through a field of grass. As he makes his way into the distance, a sudden rush of wind blows passed him towards the woman (and the spectator) flattening the tall grasses and surrounding foliage. The wind makes a loud, surging noise on the soundtrack. Tarkovsky uses the natural wind as a motif for the spirit, a visual haiku, akin to those of the poet Basho whom he revered: "The image in cinema is based on the ability to present as an observation one's own perception of an object." (Tarkovsky 107).²

Perhaps the most noticeable filmmaker devoted to wind is the Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens. Several examples of his work mirror that of Lamorisse, including his film *Pour Le Mistral* (For the Mistral, 1965) and his later film *A Tale of the Wind* (1988). *Pour Le Mistral*, a cinematic travelogue along the course of the winds of

Haute Provence, extends the slightly ominous tone of Lamorisse's first film *Crin Blanc*. Wind, in *Crin Blanc*, is not the principle feature (instead it is the relationship between a young boy and a white stallion). Yet the same investigation of the effect of landscape of human psyche is strongly in evidence. Interestingly, Ivens's film follows a similar trajectory as that of *Le Vent des Amoureux* in the sense that *Pour le Mistral* begins with the ominous clouds circling the mountains and ends at the sea. In *Pour le Mistral*, the narration (provided by Andre Verdet) is poetic and the music used by Luc Ferrari forbidding and severe. The narrator intones that "we must post a watch" on the *mistral* as the intense power of the wind can lead to chaos and destruction (this sentiment is also echoed in *Le Vent des Amoureux*). We are told that: "the Mistral likes to be resisted" (Ivens 2008) and the subsequent section of dramatic freeze-frames of the wind causing mischief (hats, letters, scarves are thrown around; a wedding ceremony is disrupted and the skirts of young women are lifted up) demonstrates this.³ The 'wind in the trees' is also evident in Ivens's film as the grasses by the sea are blown and flattened. A herd of white horses is also seen; this again echoes *Crin Blanc*. With techniques such as the freeze-frame and the sudden burst half-way through into colour cinemascope, Ivens, like Lamorisse, eschews the 'rules' of documentary cinema. Particular moments in *Pour Le Mistral* arguably prefigure Lamorisse's technique: the way in which Ivens's camera swoops over the land of the *camargue* and the final shot of *Pour Le Mistral*, where a helicopter glides out to the Mediterranean sea is mirrored in *Le Vent des Amoureux*.

LE MISTRAL: LAMORISSE'S FIRST WIND

Crin Blanc (Usually translated into English as 'White Mane,' 1952) was Albert Lamorisse's first foray into the 'cinema of winds'. The film tells the story of a young

² A less monumental but still noticeable example occurs in the British film *Enduring Love* (2004) where in the opening scene of the film a hot air balloon sweeps up into the air carried by a sudden burst of powerful wind.

³ These sentiments are also closely echoed in the song *Le Vent* by French singer Georges Brassens, the lines 'Qu'il préfère choisir les victimes de ses petits jeux' and 'Prudent, prends garde à ton chapeau,' having a particular resonance.



◀ Fig.1 | Still from *Crin Blanc* (author collection)

fisherman, Folco, who discovers a wild *Camargue* horse which he tries to befriend. The *gardians* (men who look after herds of horse and bulls in the Camargue region) of the herd, however, seek to capture and tame Crin Blanc. Folco tries to help Crin Blanc evade capture and after a long chase sequence the film ends with Folco and the horse swimming together out to sea. No less an authority than André Bazin argued that Lamorisse's early films, including *Crin Blanc*, were the 'only two real children's films ever made' (Bazin 41). Bazin typically praised the 'realism' of *Crin Blanc* (and also the subsequent film *Red Balloon*) but noted that the film introduced a 'dialectic belonging to the realm of the imaginary' (Bazin 37). In another more radical reading, *lettrist* Ivan Chtcheglov described Folco's struggle as a 'symbol of the purity of the LEGITIMATE desire for LIFE' (sic) (Chtcheglov 27).⁴ The horse in the film is clearly a real horse but also operates, via Lamorisse's cinematic lens, at the level of a dream object. The superficial gritty 'western' reality of the narrative is undercut in the final moments, when Folco and Crin Blanc swim out to sea together to a place that, the narrator informs us, could well be transcendent. The film's persistent evocation of the concept of freedom is romantic and hallucinogenic. It is notable that Chtcheglov invoked Crin Blanc in reconsidering his theorizing of the *derive*.⁵

In the opening section of the film, the wind can be seen sweeping across the plain, tossing around the horses' distinctive long hair. *Crin Blanc* is not so much a film of the 'wind in the trees' as the wind in the hair of the horse (a 'wild horse' as the film's subtitle notes- see Fig.1). The many thrilling chase scenes in the film are energized by the animals running wild through the sands and the *gaze*, *salicornia* and *radeau* typical of the region. So it is not then

just the *mistral* itself, but also the wind generated by the kinetic energy of the film form (horses racing across the land). It also blows softly around Folco's house, shaking the trees and the boy's hair, blowing his tiny boat across the waters. Later, horrifically, it blows across the marsh grasses, helping to fan the flames that the *gardians* have lit to force Crin Blanc out. At the end of the film, when Folco and Crin Blanc gallop away from the *gardians* into the sea, the camera can barely keep up with the pace. It is as if the wind is driving Folco along. When he enters the sea, a curious thing happens on the soundtrack: the crashing of the sea waves is augmented by the sound of a swirling wind (the *mistral*?).

The wild landscape, the 'savage region' of Lamorisse's Camargue was also revisited in film by the Renault motor company in their 1961 film *Ballade en Camargue*. This is an intriguing travelogue directed by Phillipe Condroyer with a dramatic score by Antoine Duhamel and drawing on the landscapes Lamorisse had offered up. The film was naturally intended to demonstrate the robust nature of their latest 'Model 4' as it traverses such rough terrain. *Ballade en Camargue* shows two Renault cars racing each other like wild horses, the cinematographers clearly visible in each car, filming each other. Duhamel's score mimics the Wild West themes of American cowboy films but throws in some gypsy inflections by way of a Classical guitar. A playful interaction between the 'ancient' and the 'modern' occurs when the two cars encircle a group of *gardians*, the torturers of Folco in *Crin Blanc*. The cars crash through pools of water and head for the marshes of the coast. Meanwhile the ancient rituals of the region are evoked as the *gardians* chase and capture the black bulls, the other mythical creature of the Camargue. Eventually the herds of white horses ridden by *gardians* merge with the cars in a chaotic *melange* of images and sounds. Of course, by attaching a narrative line closely following

⁴ In this text, Chtcheglov goes on to draw a religious parable from the film. Folco and Crin Blanc's plunge into the sea 'is the *'fuite en avant'* of the LOST CHILD, but careful, as in dreams words are often reversible and one can say the SAVED CHILD (fleeing, saving himself, saving his soul) because at the end of day it is better to DIE ALIVE than LIVE DEAD. The child, if he accepts LOSING his horse, enters into the life of the *hommes-semblants* and it will be the END for him'.

⁵ Also of significance is the fact that the screenwriter of *Crin Blanc* Denys Colomb de Daunant later made his own film of the Camargue horses *Le Songe des Chevaux Sauvages* (1960) a fantasy hymn to the wild horse that is beautifully poetic and disturbing.

a single character and a single white horse, by singling them out for specific cinematic representation, *Crin Blanc* humanises the ancient myths of Southern France. In *Ballade en Camargue*, a *gardian* eventually captures a white horse as it gallops along the shore. The film both invokes and romanticises Lamorisse's film and shows the modern car as a cinematic prop *par excellence*.

But the comic sequence of a donkey travelling in the back of the red car merely reminds us that this is the work of advertising as opposed to cinematic art. *Crin Blanc* is made of more poetic stuff. While representations of the *Midi* in culture are problematic,⁶ Lamorisse side-steps political questions and exoticism in favour of questions of the spirit. While 'stereotypes' of the *Camargue* region are evident in *Crin Blanc* (the brutish *gardians*; Folco's quaint fisher-folk family), they are figures merely placed to enhance the 'struggle' both Folco and the horse have for their freedom- the *Midi* of 'human dimensions'. The *gardians* try to break/tame the 'wild character and love of liberty' (Droit 15) of Crin Blanc and of course fail. In this way, Folco represents the free spirit of the *Camargue* ('Yes, he dreams, you see') (60). The dream-like atmosphere of some of the key scenes (for example the setting-fire of the marsh grasses by the herdsmen) and the explicit detour into one of Folco's own dreams (where he imagines Crin Blanc and himself at one by the sea), where boy and horse become a 'concentrated being' (Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*, 45-46), expands the film into the territory of poetic fantasy. The mythic quality of the story is enhanced by these moments of unusual poetry making the film one of the 'paths to the world of infinite dreams' (41). Denys Colomb de Daunat's *Poete des Chevaux*, fusing the work of horses and cattle with a philosophy of landscape and history, epitomised the mythopoetry of the *Camargue*.⁷ The film is a continuation of that.

Of course this region of southern France, the setting for the film, is renowned for its fierce wind. This wind blows through the hair of Folco and Crin Blanc and drives the boy and horse to outrun their pursuers towards their final (uncertain) destiny. Through a haunting exhibition of cinematic emotion and poetry, Lamorisse leaves the viewer deeply and profoundly stirred. The dynamism of the horse and boy in eventual harmony, an incredible cinematic vision: "The sight of movement gives happiness: *horse* (my emphasis), athlete, bird" (Bresson 73).

And what Lamorisse offers in this film is a visual representation of what Jouve calls the 'iron hooves of dream', the image of a 'dream horse swimming eternally at the side of little Folco' (Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*, 48)⁸. To be a 'truth of the imagination, it (the film image) must die and be born again of reality itself'. And cinema is like a dream where 'words are often reversible and one can (interpret Folco as) the saved child (fleeing, saving himself, saving his soul) because at the end of day it is better to DIE ALIVE than LIVE DEAD' (Chtcheglov 27).

This is what Folco and Crin Blanc, with the help of the Mistral, in this 'kingdom of space' (Droit 21), achieved: 'the kingdom of love and realisation of desire' (Chtcheglov 27).

LE VENT DE PARIS: THE SECOND WIND

A more explicit wind propels Lamorisse's second highly-acclaimed, multi award-winning⁹ film, *Le Ballon Rouge* (1956). The film tells the story of a young boy, Pascal,¹⁰ whose cheerless life is jolted by the discovery of a discarded large red balloon. Pascal quickly realises, after the balloon follows him to school, that the object has a mind of its own. A series of adventures (including a

⁶ See for example: François de la Bretèque, Images of 'Provence' in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, *Popular European Cinema* (Routledge, 1992), pp. 58-71.

⁷ Colomb de Daunat appears in the film as one of the *gardians*, as does his brother Alain.

⁸ Bachelard is quoting Pierre-Jean Jouve.

⁹ Including the Palme D'or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 (Best Short Film) and an Oscar in 1957 for Best Screenplay – Original.

¹⁰ Played by Lamorisse's son of the same name.

The film both invokes and romanticizes Lamorisse's film and shows the modern car as a cinematic prop par excellence.

confrontation at his school and the disruption of Sunday mass) culminate when a gang of boys, jealous of the balloon, attempt to burst it. This they finally achieve, only for Pascal to be hoisted high into the sky by thousands of other Parisian balloons that have gathered together out of sympathy with his plight. So in this film, another 'object' comes to life through the magic of cinematic representation. But what is it that propels the red balloon of this film? A wind certainly, but a specific kind of mischievous and magic wind, not unlike that of the mistral. In place of hats etc. being blown around, as in *Pour Le Mistral*, we witness instead the free spirit of the balloon which cannot be contained by the ugly and ruinous people around it (until the penultimate act that is). This wind is a force exclusively for the balloon- it does not affect the rest of Parisian life. The first time we see the balloon move is when Pascal, denied access to the bus, has to run to school and the balloon trails behind him as he runs. It is the kinetic energy of Pascal who makes it move (Fig.2).

Henceforth, the balloon develops its own energy and movement. When it is cast out of the apartment by Pascal's guardian, it hovers instead of being blown into the sky. The next day it follows Pascal to school- even tracking the bus when it is again refused entry (this sequence is superbly filmed by Lamorisse- the balloon rushes along the Parisian streets). But though it is mischievous (it helps the balloon dodge the clutches of the children and adults alike), the Paris wind helps Pascal. When Pascal passes a girl in the street who is carrying a blue balloon, the balloon mischievously darts back to follow the girl (is this moment a short precursor to *The*

Lover's Wind?). The wily wind blows the balloon back to Pascal (Pascal urges it to 'fly away', which it does not). When it is finally burst by one of the boys the 'wind' escaping from the balloon is the death wind, it is painful and lingered over, like the death of a main character in a drama. At the end, the wind herds the millions of Parisian balloons to raise Pascal (like Folco) to a form of transcendence. The balloon is invested, partly through the powers of cinematic reanimation, with what the surrealists define as *reframing*: ordinary and banal objects placed in an unusual or context become 'inflated' with new meaning and new powers (Keathley 68). The surrealist writer, Louis Aragon, spelled out the role children play in the creation of this unique representation:

Poets without being artists, children sometimes fix their attention on an object to the point where their concentration makes it grow larger, grow so much it completely occupies their visual field, assumes a mysterious aspect, and loses all relation to its purpose...Likewise, on the screen, objects that were a few moments ago sticks of furniture or books of cloak room tickets are transformed to the point where they take on menacing or enigmatic meanings (51-52).

It is precisely this form of poetic value that Lamorisse invests his films with.

Pascal's balloon is a vibrant red (as the title suggests) but it is not the red used in famous cinematic juxtapositions (Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, Kieslowski's *Three Colours: Red*, Spielberg's *Schindler's List*¹¹) wherein the colour red becomes a totem, but a warm more poetic red symbolizing the little boy's dreams and desires against a grey post-war Paris.

In a subsequent film *Voyage en Ballon* (1962, English title: *Stowaway in the Sky*) Lamorisse extends the simple image of the red balloon to a full-scale romantic adventure narrative again featuring Pascal, here fascinated by

¹¹ See Paul Coates, *Cinema and Colour* (Pallgrave/BFI, 2010) for an examination of this.



◀ **Fig.2** | Still from *The Red Balloon* (author collection)

his grandfather's hot-air balloon. As the old man takes the balloon on a demonstration, Pascal climbs on board and lifts them both upward to an adventure. The balloon travels all around France across the ocean and over Mont Blanc in the Alps. An anxiety is developed as the balloon (as in *Le Ballon Rouge*) turns out to have a mind of its own. We see how objects on the landscape (church spires, factory chimneys) become objects of threat. Ivens's *Pour Le Mistral* is evoked when a wedding party in Brittany is disrupted by the forces of the air. This film taps into the French obsession with hot-air balloon travel of which they were pioneers.¹² Another of Lamorisse's 'French' shorts can be seen as a 'practice run' for *Le Vent des Amoureux: Paris Jamais Vu* (1967), a twenty minute hymn to 'unseen Paris' which incorporates soaring aerial shots of the Parisian skyline accompanied by commentary written by Roger Glachart and narrated by Jean Piat.¹³

As with *Crin Blanc*, there is a nod to what Lamorisse would do with *Le Vent des Amoureux*. The final moments of the film are shot via a helicopter, the camera hovering near and adjacent to the balloons as they rise into the blue Parisian sky. Here, Lamorisse's 'Helivision' technique was being invented; the stunning sweep round famous monuments, skimming to the apex of sites such as the Paris Opéra and the Arc de Triomphe, circling the crown of the Tour Eiffel before a dramatic plunge down the shaft of the column and a glide through its legs. The camera also creeps right up close to Auguste Dumont's Génie de la Liberté at the top of the Colonne de Juillet at Place de la Bastille, an appropriate metaphor for the freedom

the camera is permitted with this 'Helivision' technique. Despite the lukewarm reception for the film, at least in the UK,¹⁴ *Le Ballon Rouge* results an entirely sympathetic representation of the uneven fantasies and dream world of childhood, the 'original impulse' of youth (Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*, 33).

THE THIRD WIND: THE LOVER'S WIND

Lamorisse's foray into cinematic wind reached its apotheosis in *Le Vent des Amoureux*.¹⁵ Not only was this his last experiment with cinematic wind it was, as noted, his final film. Like Ivens's film *Pour le Mistral*, *Le Vent des Amoureux* tracks the progress of a specific wind, in this instance one of the many powerful natural forces held in high regards by the Iranian people. The curious conceit of the film is that the entire narration is 'spoken' by *Baadah Sabah*- the Lover's wind.¹⁶ Throughout this adventure the winds 'talk' to each other. There is the 'Warm Wind', the 'Crimson Wind,' the 'Evil Wind,' and the 'Lover's Wind.' The visual quality of the film is due almost exclusively to the distinctive aerial photography Lamorisse had developed in *Paris Jamais Vu*. Dubbed 'Helivision,' the technique included fitting the film camera to the front of the helicopter so as to allow for very smooth tracking of locations (buildings, animals, clouds) and close-up shots of objects otherwise inaccessible to audiences.¹⁷ In *Le Vent des Amoureux*, we track the wind from the Persian Gulf in the south of Iran north to the Caspian Sea by way of Tehran and Persepolis. The swirling sounds of the wind open the film. We see a tornado

¹² In 1738, a golden year for French ballooning, the Montgolfier brothers reached a height of 1.5 miles in a pioneering flight at Annonay and Versailles, Jean Pilâtre de Rozier, and the Marquis d'Arlandes made the first free balloon ascent from the Bois de Boulogne and J.A.C. Charles ascended from the Champ de Mars in a balloon inflated with hydrogen gas (Theodora Fitzgibbon, *A Taste of Paris*, Dent, 1974, p.119.)

¹³ Hou Hsiao Hsien's 2007 film *Le Voyage du Ballon Rouge* is an expanded fantasy on Lamorisse's film.

¹⁴ See for example the anonymous reviewer in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (No.275, Vol.23, December, 1956) who charged Lamorisse with having 'lost the vivacity and spontaneity which are essential qualities of the world of childhood' (p. 158).

¹⁵ The film is also known in English as "The Lover's Wind" or by its Farsi title *Baadah Sabah*.

¹⁶ The narration was written by Roger Glachart.

¹⁷ Lamorisse's concept has become a generic word for spectacular aerial cinematography- especially of nature. A present-day company called "Helivision," based in North Carolina, market their product as 'gyro-stabilized aerial camera systems to film visually stunning high definition aerial footage' (see: <http://www.helivision.com/>)

of wind lifting and then dispersing the sands of the desert. The lover's wind introduces itself: 'I was born on the edge of the desert.' Subsequent remarks outline the existential angst suffered by these winds, which are both feared and hated in equal measure. 'I was an ocean wind...I wanted to escape. Was I a fool?' the wind asks at one point. The camera then flies over numerous key landmarks of the 'old' Iran: the Tower of Babel, temples and bridges and the desolated and abandoned villages, dead cities, that these winds have 'reduced to silence.' 'We have buried everything' they confess. We are shown the crushed and broken city of Persepolis, commonly held to have been sacked and burned by Alexander the Great. However, the wind informs us here: 'it was the forces of the air who destroyed the city. Not fire but the wind!' The music for this sequence is haunting and sad; elsewhere we have heard the lyrical folk strains of composer Hosein Dehlavi. A moving sequence then ensues, devoted to the nomads drifting between these derelict cities. I would suggest that Lamorisse aligns himself with these people; a people unable to settle in any one place at a time but longing for the eternal drift. The hideous spectacle of the 'tower of the dead' reveals how corpses are dragged up to the apex of the building and left to be blackened by the intense heat of the sun. Then the fishermen pushing their boats along the shallow lines 'pushing their own towers of silence' the narration informs us. Suddenly the breeze blows one of the boats over while the wind informs us we are seeing the 'wind of sudden death'. The dazzling abstractions of the landscape and of the sea is enhanced by the relentless journey of the air-born camera. At one point, we follow an oil pipeline from the waters of the port, across the desert, the pipes that 'bring fire.'

But *Le Vent des Amoureux* is not simply a rural

excursion. We also get to experience the 'winds of the city'- modern Tehran where the abstractions of man-made structures dazzle and astound. In one virtuoso moment, the camera swoops down through a window frame and inside the Golestan Palace in order that we can (clandestinely) witness the shimmering treasures within. But the wind tires of the city and departs again across the rice fields which reflect the patterns of the sky. The wind, virtually omnipresent, seeks to find its own 'private paradise'- the Caspian Sea. This constant journeying takes its toll; it creates a 'wearing away of memory' (which fortunately Lamorisse's film camera preserves). This took me back to Michel Droit's response to the Camargue: in this liminal space 'at once miracle and mirage' one can 'lose all notion of space and time...' (Droit 64). The film thus achieves the highest level of Bachelard's 'poetic imagination,' where 'the function of the real and the function of the unreal are made to cooperate' (Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*, xxxi).

The Helivision technique perfectly encapsulates the violence of the wind. At times it is not clear whether it is the wind we are following or the blast caused by the helicopter's blades that are blasting people and things on the ground. A surreal moment is when the camera alights on hundreds of carpets being washed and laid out to dry in the sun across the slopes of a rock mountainside. Is it the wind of the blades that are hurling them about, casting the objects into the sky?¹⁸ The freedom sought in every Lamorisse film from the confines of modern capitalism are evoked at the end of the film where two lovers ride away on horseback pursued by a gang of 'bandits' (this is actually part of a traditional Iranian rural wedding festival). Just as the horsemen are closing in the wind blows for one final

¹⁸ I have written elsewhere on the potentially violent and abusive effect of the helicopter camera shot. In Jacopetti and Prosperi's controversial drama-documentary *Addio Zio Tom* (1972), a recreation of the conditions of slavery in the Southern United States, the film opens with a strong wind blasting cotton pickers working in the fields). In 1973, another renowned French director, Claude Lelouch, made a documentary called *Iran* which opens with familiar 'Helivision' shots. The film proceeds in the manner of 1970s European documentary with a series of contrasting juxtapositions of old and new, elliptical framing, a series of startling edits (a shot of a man lighting an oil lamp is cut with that of an oil explosion) and unusual manipulations of sound (at one point the sound of a young girl's laughing echoes around a montage of Islamic temples). The music was provided by major film composer Francis Lai and incorporates the lush orchestrations for which is famous. Aside from the opening sequence (and some of the locations and preoccupations and the final coda which it resembles stylistically somewhat), it has little in common with Lamorisse's film which offers a highly subjective and spiritual/mystical interpretation of the country.

time, sending the hunters back from where they came and the lovers to speed off in freedom.

The bizarre coda which Lamorisse was forced to add to the film (the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Art, who funded the film, were displeased that the film did not show enough of the modern Iran), which includes footage shot on Lamorisse's final, fatal, helicopter adventure, merely reinforces the repressive nature of the urban environment. Factories, laboratories, universities, cars, textile production and the development of Iran's Nuclear reactor (a project creating a certain level of anxiety in the present time) are all documented in a static and dystopian manner and a 'uniformity' of message (Naficy).¹⁹ In place of the lyricism of *Le Vent des Amoureux* (and of the other films), here there are sharp and hurried edits. This time we hear the synthetic wind of so-called 'progress'; in place of traditional folk music we hear haunting sounds of the contemporary synthesizer. This six-minute sequence is filled with the nervous dread of science-fiction films such as *The Andromeda Strain* and *Phase IV*. There is even, at one point, a curious shot of a small red balloon (part of the chemical process), a pathetic and a sad reminder of the glorious tradition of Lamorisse's previous cinematic works. The final images of this coda, repeated helivision shots of the Karaj Dam edited by Jeanne Claude Lamorisse after her husband's death, add an incredibly sad and poignant sensibility to the film- the final expulsions of Lamorisse's romantic and creative force, blunted and neutered by the forces of a 'false image of progressiveness' (224). This cinematic location we are watching is now a site of death.

CONCLUSION: A BOUT DE SOUFFLÉ

"All great, simple images reveal a psychic state" (Bachelard *The Poetics of Space*, 72). In these three films, wind for Lamorisse represents a form of mystical

transcendence from the everyday into another spirit world. Lyall Watson claims that 'there are no photographs of the wind,' yet Lamorisse's films contradict this (254). The wind, from *Crin Blanc* to his last film, is to remain 'a great sanctuary' (Droit 66). That is not to say that the ordinary 'earth' is superseded. The spirit of the wind must interact with the human realm; it is this co-existence which Lamorisse searched to find and to show in his short but significant film output. For Lamorisse, the story of his films emerged out of the creation of the 'dreaming consciousness' and the magnificent cinematic image (xvi). In this he echoes Raul Ruiz who argued that 'it is the type of image produced that determines the narrative, not the reverse' (8). Lamorisse, especially with *Le Vent des Amoureux* can be seen as a 'shamanic film-maker' who takes us on a 'voyage to different worlds' (Ruiz 105). All his films explore 'liberating aerial motion' (Bachelard, *Air and Dreams* 8). The poetic nature of spaces of the natural landscape can also be found, as all his films demonstrate, via architecture. Lamorisse shows that "Cinema and architecture function as alluring projection screens for our emotions" (McCann 382).

Lamorisse was a 'tender and wistful film-maker, more lyrical than sentimental' (Martin 79). Perhaps this is why he is now almost invisible. The sad coda to *Baadeh Sabah* seems to epitomise his life and work: 'I have turned mellow. Now I am pure scent and music, I have become Baadeh sabah- the lover's wind. Whenever you see trees stirring gently in a special way know that it is Baadeh Sabah passing by, urging flowers, bodies souls and flesh to come to life.'

Finally, if one were to compare Lamorisse to a writer, it would be the Provencal novelist Henri Bosco, once described as "the greatest dreamer of modern times." Bosco's mystical stories, mostly concerned with the ancient, primordial forces of the earth, find a cinematic expression in Lamorisse's films. Bazin's

¹⁹ According to Naficy, this troubling form of representation was shaped by the Pahlavi regime with the collaboration of Western filmmakers. In some senses Lamorisse did not play along with this, and paid the price.

observation that Lamorisse's work was a 'documentary on the dream' is borne out by these three unforgettable films (46). ■

*Lamorisse's foray into cinematic wind reached its apotheosis in **Le Vent Amoureux**.*

WORKS CITED

- Aragon, Louis. "On Décor." *The Shadow and its Shadow: surrealist writings on the cinema*, edited by Paul Hammond, City Lights, 2001, pp. 50-54.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, 1969.
- . *Air and Dreams: an essay on the imagination of movement*. The Dallas Institute, 1988.
- Bazin, André. "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage." *What is Cinema?* California UP, 2005, pp.41-52.
- Bresson, Robert. *Notes on the Cinematographer*. København, Green Integer, 1997.
- Chesterton, G.K. "The Wind and the Trees." *Tremendous Trifles*. Dodd, Mead and Company, 1909, pp.59-63.
- Chitchevlov, Ivan. "Fragments of commentary on the formulary." *Ecrits Retrouvés*. Editions Allia, 2006, pp.7-29.
- Droit, Michel. *Camargue*. London, George Allen and Unwin, 1963.
- Keathley, Christian. *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees*. Indiana UP, 2006.
- McCann, Ben. "A Discreet Character? Action spaces and architectural specificity in French poetic realist cinema." *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2004, pp. 375-382.
- Martin, Marcel. *France*. Zwemmer/Barnes, 1971.
- Naficy, Hamid. "Non-fiction Fiction: documentaries on Iran." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3/4, 1979, pp. 217-238.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. "The Cinema of Poetry." *Movies and Methods*, edited by Bill Nichols, California UP, 1976, pp. 542-558.
- Pour Le Mistral*. Directed by Joris Ivens. Europese Stichting Joris Ivens/Capi Films, 2008.
- Ruiz, Raul. *Poetics of Cinema*. Paris: Dis Voir, 2005.
- Tarkovsky, Andrei. *Sculpting in Time*. The Bodley Head, 1986.
- Watson, Lyall. *Heaven's Breath: a natural history of the wind*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1984.